

Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge Largemouth Bass

WARNING

High levels of Mercury in largemouth bass.

Pregnant women and children under seven years - DO NOT eat largemouth bass from this Refuge.

Other: Limit meals of largemouth bass caught here to two meals per month.

The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service is advising pregnant women and children under seven years, DO NOT eat largemouth bass (also known as black bass) from the Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge. The general population should limit eating largemouth bass to no more than two meals per month.

Sampling and analysis of the fish has detected a high level of mercury in largemouth bass. Some fish over ten inches were found to contain a mercury level higher than the level the U.S. Food and Drug Administration recommends as safe to eat in unlimited amounts.

The mercury is from unknown sources. It may be due to:

- Atmospheric deposition of pollutants.
- leaching from sites associated with former gold-mining operations.
- naturally occurring component of geological formations.

The water is currently safe. When properly filtered, the water in the Wichita Mountains lakes is currently safe for drinking. The mercury in the bass causes no problem with the safety of the water for drinking or contact with skin.

The lakes within the Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge are known for their scenic beauty and abundant fishing opportunities. Sport fishing will continue to be popular in the Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge because the mercury problem comes from eating too much of the fish, not from handling them and returning them to the lake.

You will see the sign at right posted at public access areas near the Refuge lakes to alert you of this problem:



ATTENTION ANGLERS

Largemouth Bass in
Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge
Contain a high level of MERCURY

Pregnant women and
children under 7 years
Do NOT eat bass

All Others - Limit Consumption
of Bass to Not More Than
2 meals per month

Further Information Available
at Visitor Center

Questions and Answers

Q: What should I do if I have eaten largemouth bass from the Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge?

A: If you are pregnant, talk to your doctor. Unless you have eaten a large amount of these fish daily, you are probably okay. If you are unsure, contact your doctor.

Q: Should I keep the largemouth I have in the freezer?

A: Yes, but limit the number of largemouth bass meals per month to two. Pregnant women or small children should not consume these fish.

Q: Will catching and releasing bass be harmful to me or my family?

A: No. Only eating the fish may be harmful.

Q: How is mercury harmful to our bodies?

A: Mercury builds up in the body over a long period of time. At certain levels, mercury can cause damage to the liver, kidneys, and the nervous system. It is more likely to cause harm in developing nervous systems of fetuses and small children.

Q: Why were largemouth bass found to have higher levels of mercury?

A: Largemouth bass eat other fish and water creatures. This leads to a higher mercury level intake for largemouth bass than that of other fish.

Q: What about mercury levels in other fish?

A: Mercury levels were much lower in the other fish. The high levels of mercury have so far only been found in largemouth bass that are high up the food chain. A good general rule of thumb is: *The larger the fish, the higher the level of mercury.*

Q: Has this occurred in other places?

A: Other nearby states such as Texas, Arkansas, and Louisiana have similar problems.